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United Spinal Association & National Spinal Cord Injury Association Statement for Record â€“ Peggy Hathaway

FCC Broadband Staff Workshop
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Broadband Accessibility for People with Disabilities II:
Barriers, Opportunities, and Policy Recommendations

United Spinal Association
United Spinal Association is a nonprofit organization with members in all 50 states that was formed by paralyzed veterans in 1946. Throughout its history, United Spinal Association has dedicated its energy and talents to improving the quality of life for Americans with spinal cord injuries and disorders. United Spinal Association is also a VA-authorized veterans service organization serving veterans with disabilities of all kinds.

National Spinal Cord Injury Association (NSCIA)
Formed in 1948, NSCIA is the nationâ€™s oldest and largest civilian organization dedicated to improving the quality of life for hundreds of thousands of Americans living with the results of spinal cord injury and disease (SCI/D) and their families, from the onset of injury or disease and throughout all the stages of life. We provide information and referrals to individuals with SCI/D, their families, and their service providers and connect people with our more than 50 chapters and support groups nationwide.

Panel 2 â€“ Barriers and opportunities for people with SCI/D/mobility disabilities

Good Morning. I am Peggy Hathaway. I represent both United Spinal Association and the National Spinal Cord Injury Association on federal public policy issues. Eric Larson and Mary Brooner of the National Spinal Cord Injury Association regret that they are unable to be here today.

Both the National Spinal Cord Injury Association and United Spinal Association serve Americans living with paralysis resulting from spinal cord injuries or disorders â€“ or SCI/D. While the causes and the specific levels of impairment vary, people with SCI/D generally have gross and fine motor skill limitations. It is important to understand that these physical limitations impact not only mobility â€“ getting to work, to school and so forth, and then moving around in those environments, but can often also impact their ability to operate commonly used communications devices such as telephones, computers and keyboards â€“ both the hardware itself and commonly used software. The degree and type of motor skill limitation vary widely with SCI/D -- built in access works in some cases, while others require specialized assistive technologies such as voice activated controls, to have access to communications technologies.

The population of people impacted in this way is significant. A recent population study conducted by The University of New Mexico, School of Medicine Health Sciences Center , shows that
â€¢ Approximately 6 million people in the United States are living with paralysis. This is nearly 33% more than previous estimates showed.
â€¢ Household income for those who reported being paralyzed is heavily skewed towards lower income brackets, and is significantly lower than household income for the country as a whole as reported by the United States Census.
â€¢ While paralysis is fairly evenly distributed between males and females, paralysis due to spinal cord injury is greater among males and men are nearly twice as likely (1.77) to incur a spinal cord injury as females.
â€¢ Just over three-quarters of those who reported being paralyzed were White (77.8%). Nonetheless paralysis is disproportionately distributed among minority communities, including African Americans and Native Americans, when compared to ethnicity data from the United States Census. Among Hispanics, however, those who reported being paralyzed represented approximately the same percentage as those who reported being Hispanic in the United States Census.

Yet, people with spinal cord injuries and diseases are quite capable of contributing meaningfully to the United States economy and achieving economic independence. For people who have acquired spinal cord injuries or disorders, on-line education and skills training can often lead to new careers. Access to broadband Internet has made telecommuting attractive to employers and employees -- enabling increased employment opportunities for people for whom mobility or health issues make working from home more appealing.

Those Americans living with paralysis who have broadband access use it for work as well as access to health care and also for educational purposes. To increase the access to broadband and its use by this population, the National Spinal Cord Injury Association and United Spinal Association make the following specific recommendations for inclusion in the FCCâ€™s national broadband plan:

â€¢ Continuation and expansion of programs that encourage broadband investment and network build out in rural areas to provide the means for unserved users to connect.
â€¢ Cost is a major barrier to broadband access for many of our constituents. Programs subsidizing equipment and connection expenses, as well as necessary assistive technology, (similar to the USF) are critical to persons with SCI/D. For example, to someone living on an SSI payment of about $674 per month â€“ as many people with disabilities do â€“ the cost of a computer and adaptive software and equipment â€“ not to mention the cost of subscribing to a service -- is prohibitive. On the other hand, if they have these things, they may be able to be employed, and they can use these tools to minimize social isolation and communicate with their service providers.
â€¢ Programs designed to educate prospective broadband Internet users should be implemented so they can more quickly realize the benefits. Programs should be designed to incorporate messaging and training about access for persons with disabilities, including those living with the results of SCI/D. In addition, communications should be encouraged that are targeted directly at the disability community. For example, the FCC may consider re-working its own website so that information about broadband and programs to support broadband are clearly called out for various disabilities so that it is easy for a consumer with SCI/D or some other disability to find the information that will most help him or her.

â€¢ The National Broadband Plan should have incentives to develop or build Broadband equipment operable without touch or pressure from touch. Speech, eye movements, brain wave activity are ways many of the most severely impaired can use BB. Applied research needs funding. Above all, the FCC should advocate a path for continued private investment so these realities can be achieved

Panel 3: Accessibility and Affordability Barriers to Broadband and Internet Faces by People with Disabilities.
Good Morning. I am Peggy Hathaway. I represent both United Spinal Association and the National Spinal Cord Injury Association on federal public policy issues. Eric Larson and Mary Brooner of the National Spinal Cord Injury Association regret that they are unable to be here today.
Employment is a huge priority for people with SCI/D because of the broad positive impact employment has, first on the emotional, mental and physical health of the individual but also on the community and economy.
People with spinal cord injuries and diseases are quite capable of contributing meaningfully to the United States economy. If a person acquires SCI/D through an injury or illness as an adult, his or

her skills and training are intact. What is needed are employment accommodations for the paralysis. Here, broadband along with appropriate software and assistive technologies are huge opportunities for returning to the work force. In addition, for people who have acquired spinal cord injuries or disease, on-line education and skills training can often lead to new careers.
Unemployment rates are dramatically higher among SCI/D constituents than in the population as a whole. According to 2007 Disability Status Report published by Cornell University :
â€¢ In 2007, the employment rate of working-age people with disabilities in the US was 36.9 percent.
â€¢ In 2007, the employment rate of working-age people without disabilities in the US was 79.7 percent.
â€¢ The gap between the employment rates of working-age people with and without disabilities was 42.8 per¬centage points.
â€¢ Employment of non-institutionalized working-age people (ages 21 to 64) with â€œPhysicalâ€ disabilities was 31.3%.
According to the University of Alabama Spinal Cord Injury Information Network , about 40% of persons with paraplegia and 30% of persons with tetraplegia (quadriplegia) eventually return to work.

Access to broadband Internet has made telecommuting attractive to employers and employees enabling increased employment opportunities for people who mobility or health issues make work from home more appealing. In an April 2009 study sponsored by Beaumont Enterprise (1), the author found that increased broadband Internet access could lead to the creation of 273,000 new telecommuting jobs.
Even beyond the benefits to employers, employees, and the economy, telecommuting will provide our members and others like them with the not only support their families but to contribute to the greater good of society. It is our belief that universal broadband Internet access combined with new assistive technologies will provide everyone with a spinal cord injury or disease an opportunity to work and earn a living.
Let me describe a real life example of how access to broadband â€“ with individualized adaptive technology and software can enable someone with severe SCI to be employed and participate in the community. Tom Cooke, a member of the United Spinal Association Board, had a severe SCI at age 19 in 1990. His injury is quite high in the spine â€“ he cannot use his hands, though he can nod his head. After a year in the hospital, he went on to earn both a bachelor's and a master's degree.

Tom lives in Queens in New York City and has access to high speed internet.

â€¢ Speech recognition/voice activated internet access has made all the difference to him. Tom uses head action to use a mouse. By contrast, when he was in college, he used a mouth stick to type 15 page papers which is very time-consuming.
â€¢ He uses the computer for emails, phone calls, reading the news, watching speeches, etc.
â€¢ These tools enable him to work â€“ and to participate in the community. He ran his own

campaign for New York City Council (which he lost) and was employed as the campaign director for another New York City Council candidate. He has also had paid employment tutoring high school students for standardized tests.
â€¢ Tomâ€™s employment and substantial civic engagement are both enabled by his access to broadband and software and equipment that meet his individual needs.
â€¢ Because Tomâ€™s injury was while he was in the military, as a veteran with a service connected injury, he is entitled to VA benefits. He can afford to get a new computer every couple of years and itâ€™s manageable to pay $100 for new software. This enables him to get new technology as it comes out. It is not just the accessibility of the internet but the ability to afford appropriate equipment and to be trained in using it that is essential. Even if broadband is available in public libraries, if it doesnâ€™t have the right software and equipment to enable a particular person with disabilities to use it, it doesnâ€™t do that person any good.
â€¢ Tom has a van in which he can ride as a passenger but it is often better to take public transportation in NYC. With telecommuting, he can do a great deal of work at home.
â€¢ Tom is confident that in most jobs he can be productive with his level of disability â€“ because of access to broad band and appropriate computers, software and equipment.
Tom hopes that broadband will be available throughout the country â€“ and that adaptive computers, software and other technology will be available to everyone who needs it â€“ with subsidies for people who cannot afford these things. These will make a huge difference in peopleâ€™s personal lives, lives and can help them be employed â€“ and be taxpayers. Itâ€™s a win-win for the individual and for American productivity.

Thank you for this opportunity to participate in these panels on behalf of both the National Spinal Cord Injury Association and United Spinal Association. We look forward to continued participation and partnering with the FCC.